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AUTHOR Stoner, Mark; Martin, Linda
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ABSTRACT

Therapy provides a useful model for teaching critical thinking by placing thinking processes in the context of the whole person. Critical thinking is grounded in the language skills of the student as the student attempts to construct a structure of reality that is well-adapted to the student's relational contexts. The didactic model of teaching does little to facilitate students learning how to adapt creatively to the changing world in which they exist; in fact, a didactic approach not only inhibits holonomy in students, but actually contributes to inappropriate, ineffective, and unhealthy coping responses by creating schizophrenogenic environments. The therapeutic approach to teaching involves skillful listening and questioning to develop insight into student thinking patterns and responding to the student by summarizing, clarifying, synthesizing, acknowledging, and empathizing. With a commitment to a therapeutic approach to teaching, teachers can ensure that the students become thoughtful and confident in their ability to think critically about significant problems and communicate their conclusions to others. (Contains 23 references.) (JDD)

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TEACHING AS THERAPY: CONVEYING THINKERS TO HOLONOMY

Mark Stoner and Linda Martin
California State University, Sacramento

Presented at the 13th Annual Conference on Critical Thinking and Educational Reform, Sonoma State University, August 1-4, 1993.

"Students who succeed in my class are compulsive."
--A Well-Intentioned High School Chemistry Teacher

Critical thinking is not a solely cognitive activity that occurs within a vacuum, but the action of a whole person conducted within the context of the thinker's life-situation, and that context is related to how well the thinker may be able to think. We know from our own experience that certain conditions such as threat, time-pressure, a chaotic environment, and emotional strains of all sorts make clear thinking difficult, if not impossible. One question we want to explore is the degree to which our schools and classrooms facilitate or inhibit critical thinking by the emotional environment created for students.

Some of the typical problems within the schools presently, as identified by Richard Paul, are: fragmentation of the curriculum, little or no active integration of content and students' life experience, personal points of view are rarely considered relevant, students are not taught to systematically question and correct perceptions, time for reflection is rare, students rarely have time to talk through questions and problems of learning, and students are not taught meta-cognitive skills (1989). Taken together, the conditions described by Paul suggest that the classroom is often a place where students are forced to disconnect themselves from the learning process. The didactic model features rote learning, and right answers, leaving little or no room for the messiness and "waste" of exploration of alternative solutions, experimentation, and trial and error; methods which we all use in everyday life to solve problems, create new concepts, processes, and products. The irony is the persistence of the vision of the schools as places that nurture the mind. That irony surfaces as double-binds (Bateson) for students that lead to a kind of "schizophrenia" in students as they attempt to cope, as best they can, with the conditions they face at school.

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THE DOUBLE-BIND AND SCHIZOPHRENIA

According to Gregory Bateson, the double-bind is a set of schizophrenogenic conditions characterized by the following:

1) Two or more people interacting--one of which is the "victim"
2) Repeated experience--the double bind structure "comes to be an habitual expectation"
3) A primary negative injunction--e.g. "Do X, or I will punish you."
4) A secondary negative injunction conflicting with the first--"Do only X, and I will punish you."
5) A tertiary negative injunction prohibiting the victim from leaving the field.

Finally, all conditions need not be constantly present once the "victim has learned to perceive his universe in double bind patterns" (206). The result of such perceptions are generally coping behaviors that are more or less "schizophrenic."

These conditions are easily created more or less in the school situation. Students and teachers interact on a daily basis. Often teachers, usually unwittingly, create primary and secondary negative injunctions in the classroom. For example, a teacher may demand that students approach a problem as the teacher taught them to solve it ("Do only X, or I will punish you."); at the same time, the teacher may chide students for being "thoughtless," "uncreative," or "unwilling to take risks" when they move lock-step through the problem-solving method, get stuck at some point and make no effort to modify the method to solve the problem. ("Do only X, and I will punish you."). The teacher places the student in a double bind by insisting on exact use of the method taught, and, simultaneously expecting creativity in modifying the method without providing to students sufficient context markers by which the student may discern when to "break the rules" of the method. Finally, (by law in K-12 schools) students must return to the situation regularly--the tertiary injunction. Over time, students' thinking begins to exhibit problems with logical types (Bateson) due to the ambiguity of contexts created by the double-binds.

SCHIZOPHRENIA DEFINED

Schizophrenia is generally understood as a "thought disorder" (Matson and Beck 540) manifesting itself in inappropriate logic and language usage which makes it a problem particularly relevant to teaching critical thinking. Specifically, it is defined, "as a syndrome in which there are characteristic disturbances in several of the following areas: content and form of thought, perception, affect, sense of self, volition, relationship to the external world and psychomotor behavior" (Cantor 279). Further, it is "known to us only through . . . [the clients] communication and, similarly . . . we are known to him only through ours" (Weblin in Jackson 31). Bateson also focuses on the relationship between language and logic

in characterizing schizophrenia. Specifically, schizophrenics have difficulty in managing logical types appropriately. For example, a schizophrenic will exhibit a deviant logical structure such as:

Men die
Grass dies
Men are grass. (205)

Bateson suggests that the base problem is that schizophrenics use language rich in metaphor (the basic mechanism of all human communication), but the metaphors are idiosyncratic or "unlabeled" (205), or used out of context (206). Such confusion, as it manifests itself weakly or strongly in students, we argue, is a result, at least in part, of students existing in a curricular and organizational nexus described above. That is, the curriculum is fragmented, presented as discrete facts to be understood apart from the self, and the daily conditions of the double-bind facilitate inappropriate response to themselves, the school, and the thinking process.

Some behaviors characteristic of schizophrenics are:

1) Staring off into space when in a clear communication context
2) Responding with incongruent verbal and nonverbal messages
3) Silence and withdrawal
4) Talk that is rich in metaphor and oblique associations which divert listener's attention into a maze of by-ways
5) Destructive behavior
6) Assertions that others have no right to question their behavior (Weblin 33-4).

<u>Behaviors specifically related to critical thinking</u>

7) Overinclusiveness resulting in loss of conceptual boundaries
8) Flouting of formal logic by transducive reasoning
9) Assuming logical relationships are symmetrical at all times
10 Failure to screen relevant from irrelevant information (Athey 158)

Weblin makes clear that these are learned behaviors (34) that are "a highly goal-directed activity towards avoiding almost any clearly defined relationships at all" (32). In other words, students caught in double-binds learn to cope by "checking out" of "environments pervaded by anxiety, ambivalence, and instability; where no one feels secure . . . " (34). Such behaviors are not confined to misfits in troubled inner city schools, but surface in apparently comfortable suburban schools, too, and in apparently successful students (See Appendix 1). Bateson argues that schizophrenia can be both "overt" and "covert" (261-2); the student who wrote "Needles and Pins" suggests covert schizophrenia. It would seem that many of the negative behaviors we see in students, as well as their difficulties in reasoning, suggest that they exhibit some degree of schizophrenia as they attempt to cope with

their circumstances at school (as well as home, no doubt). With the problem of a "thought disorder" fairly pervasive in the schools, it is important that we do all we can to ameliorate the problem.

COMPARING TEACHING AND THERAPY

If the learner is subjected to circumstances which inhibit or disrupt the thinking process, a narrow focus on teaching the techniques of critical thinking will be of little value. We suggest that teachers of critical thinking pay close attention to the structure of their classes and assess their basic assumptions about students and stance toward students that may create or sustain double-binds that are "crazy-makers" for students. This larger context is suggested by Harvey Siegel as he argues that a critical thinker has "a propensity or disposition to behave and act in accordance with reasons . . ." (qtd. in McPeck 79), and teachers of critical thinking should "develop the disposition to use those skills" (McPeck 19). Siegel's focus on "disposition" opens the door to thinking about critical thinking within a larger context than simply cognition; we need to include the affective state of the learner in our teaching. As Carl Rogers asked:

> If the creation of an atmosphere of acceptance, understanding, and respect is the most effective basis for facilitating the learning which is called therapy, then might it not be the basis for the learning which is called education? (1951 384).

Rogers' review of the psychotherapeutic literature uncovered findings that have direct connection to teaching critical thinking. First, he found that therapy, as a teaching act, facilitated, over time, significant shifts in how clients talk and think about their life situation. Specifically, as therapy progressed, clients increased the number of insightful statements about their situation; particularly their understandings of relationships of concepts, and interpersonal relationships (1951 134-5), and showed significant increase in perceptual acuity via shifts in language (135; 143-5). Finally, clients shifted the locus of control from an external to an internal locus while developing skills in creating appropriate criteria for evaluation of their behavior and the behavior of others (151; 157). The overall result of this kind of teaching was an "increased unification and integration of personality" (178). In other words, therapy, as a teaching act, produced improved reasoning skills marked by <u>increased precision of language and more appropriate evaluation criteria for judgement of personal behavior and the behavior of others.</u>

Rogers' model of good therapy differs from models of good teaching only in emphasis. Actually, Rogers' model draws heavily from the Socratic method which is much like that of the therapist who, by careful questioning and probing, facilitates clients discovery of their own resources for positive growth and change in thinking and feeling. The integrated personality is aware of and in control her own thinking processes, as well as her affective

responses to events and people; is able to make reasoned choices about her responses to ideas, events and people; such a person can be described as holonomous. The focus of the therapist on developing in the client via questioning and probing greater perceptual acuity, increased precision in categorization and reasoning, increased personal responsibility for one's thinking, and increased ability to develop appropriate evaluative criteria are all compatible with the goals of teachers of critical thinking. How, exactly are these critical thinking goals reached in the classroom?

THERAPEUTIC TEACHING SKILLS

The traditional lecture approach certainly has its place in quickly dispensing information that students cannot easily or efficiently gather elsewhere; it is useful for presenting new ideas or perspectives, and it can be helpful in generating student enthusiasm for a topic. However, it does little to engage students in personal confrontation of issues or practice in critical thinking skills. Teachers of therapists have opted for methods closely resembling therapy itself by using small group conferences, case analysis, and non-didactic methods such as coaching to facilitate a closer alignment between their goals in teaching and student behavior and development (Sachs and Shapiro). More specifically, Gustafson argues that listening is the key component of therapeutic teaching (211). Skillful listening for the teacher, as well as for the therapist, provides the teacher with significant information about how students construe their world; what students perceive as significant data, and how they categorize, interpret, and evaluate that data. Insight into student thinking patterns provides the teacher with information that facilitates conveying students to their own insights regarding the appropriateness and precision of their linguistic representations of reality, and facilitates student experimentation with new patterns of thinking. The result of a shift of emphasis from lecturing to questioning and listening may be a decrease in teachers constantly practicing skills in generating and applying criteria for evaluating student behavior, and an increase in students learning and practicing those skills themselves. After all, our goal is to create such critical habits of mind in students. A key to therapeutic teaching, according to Gustafson, is using what is learned, by listening, about student thinking patterns to replace reward systems with "context markers" that help students keep track of their own progress through the course content. The trick is knowing for what to listen.

THE META-MODEL

A simple map for listening and questioning was developed by John Grinder and Richard Bandler from observing the work of therapists Fritz Perls and Virginia Satir. The meta-model recognizes that language in use has inherent biases, and gaps that may lead to incorrect conclusions about the nature of reality as constructed by the user of language. The symbol systems humans

employ pose obstacles to users in expressing ideas due to inherent gaps in any language. That is, every time one conceives a thought, that thought must undergo some significant modification before it can be expressed in language. The complexity of our thoughts seems to outstrip our language's ability to express all the complexity of them at the same time. We learn to focus on parts of the thought, giving up other parts, in order to make statements to others that are sensible within the rules of our language systems. As thoughts move from the highly complex "deep structure" to a simpler "surface structure," parts are DELETED, they typically become GENERALIZATIONS, or are DISTORTED from their original structure. For language users unaware of the inherent presence and influence of deletions, generalizations and distortions, these phenomena can lead to significant mistakes in reasoning. For "schizophrenics," who have the compounded problems of reasoning discussed above, these inherent problems of language serve to make reasoning properly even more difficult.

At least four uses of the meta-model can be made by the teacher using it as a listening map: gathering information about student thinking patterns, clarifying students' meanings, identifying limitations in students' perceptions, and opening up choices for student responses to problems they confront (O'Connor and Seymour 112). From the information gathered, teachers can begin to convey students to greater precision in thinking and greater differentiation in feeling via questioning.

QUESTIONING

For the teacher of critical thinking who adopts a therapeutic approach, questioning, not lecturing, is the mechanism by which students are taught how to think critically; as Richard Paul noted, "one can only facilitate the conditions under which people learn for themselves by figuring out or thinking things through" (202), which echoes Rogers' contention that, "We cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning (1951 389).

The task of the teacher is to listen carefully to students and pose questions that will facilitate students becoming aware of the gaps in their language, and provide appropriate information and qualification when needed to carefully and reasonably construct and adapt to the life situation. Below are some examples of the deletions, generalizations and distortions with accompanying questions designed to begin a conversation for the purpose of assisting students in thinking more precisely. The list is only suggestive of the patterns; feel free to develop more of your own examples and responses.

Deletions are marked by a lack of specificity in nouns, verbs, comparisons, judgments, and nominalizations (turning nouns into verbs). Following are some examples of problematic language and questions designed to assist students in diminishing the influence of this characteristic of language.

Problem of Specificity	Question to Resolve Problem
They're working on a plan to eliminate public schools.	Who is?
This plan works better.	Better than what?
I'm a selfish person.	What are your standards for that judgement?

Generalizations are marked by a focus on limitations and universal conclusions.

Problem of Generalization	Question to Resolve Problem
I can't solve this problem.	What prevents you from solving it?
I can't get anything right!	Has there ever been a time when you have gotten something right?

Distortions are marked by complex equivalences, presuppositions, cause/effect relationships, and mind reading.

Problem of Distortion	Question to Resolve Problem
You don't smile much; you must not like teaching.	How does not smiling mean I don't like teaching?
If you are a fundamentalist then you can't be fair-minded.	How does being a fundamentalist necessarily prevent fair-mindedness?
You frighten me.	What, specifically, do I do that frightens you?
Frank doesn't think much about the problem. (O'Connor and Seymour 96-116)	How, exactly, do you know that?

To convey thinkers to holonomy, it is important that we facilitate precise thinking in the total life situation, and not focus on cognition to the exclusion of the larger context of the students's thinking. Christenbury and Kelly suggest that teachers attend to the interface of three general dimensions of student experience that interact and affect the student's ability to think critically. (See Appendix 2). The didactic approach to teaching and learning attends almost solely to "the matter" or the content of the course. Low level fact questions to be answered correctly

are preeminent. However, as we know, "the matter" cannot really be understood outside of the learner's personal reality and the reality external to the learner. The questioning strategies examined above are designed to provide data about how learners understand the matter, construe their own reality and how that fits with external reality. This questioning map is consistent with the concerns of a therapist who assists a client in aligning the three areas in an appropriate configuration (Watzlawick). What this map suggests is that the teacher of critical thinking who desires to convey students to holonomy will listen for and probe students' constructs of reality as well as their understanding of content; for it not just mastery of content that is necessary for successful navigation of life, but how the student manages the interaction of these areas. However, appropriate questioning is not the only skill necessary for therapeutic teaching. Once the questions are asked, the teacher must respond to the students.

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS

The authors are finding, in their work with faculty, that faculty have a propensity to respond to students (and each other) in the following order: evaluation, opinion, description, and finally, questions. In other words, as teachers attempt to help students, and colleagues, they, almost without exception, evaluate (both positively and negatively) the behaviors in others they have observed; next, out of a desire to help and "teach," they offer opinions and suggestions to solve problems they perceive; occasionally they offer to the student or colleague a description of behavior observed for use by the student or colleague in solving their own problem; least often, teachers engage in coaching of others by posing questions designed to facilitate the thinking of the other in whatever direction the other person feels it should go. It must be noted here that questioning, from a therapeutic teaching perspective, is primarily for the purpose of helping students engage in meta-cognitive work, to think about their thinking and learning habits, rather than providing correct answers to fact questions about whatever content happens to be under consideration; we assume students will get to the content for their thinking will be about something (McPeck). Our experience in coaching university faculty is that the act of questioning and paraphrasing answers, over time, develops deep and significant changes in how the other person thinks about themselves and their context. Faculty, report making significant, positive, self-directed changes in their teaching as a result of questioning patterns derived from therapeutic models. Not only have faculty reported significant changes in how they think, but also report significant changes in how they feel about themselves, and their work. In a word, they report feeling more integrated as thinking and feeling creatures. Their learning is long-lasting, on-going, significant, and satisfying. Some specific examples of such therapeutic moves are discussed next.

Questioning and responding are integrated actions. As we saw above, questioning, from a therapeutic perspective, is designed to facilitate precision in student thinking, and direct the student to the internal resources they possess to solve problems they face. Thinking is extended and evaluation is avoided when the teacher provides data to the student about their thinking by paraphrasing student responses. The paraphrase is not simple repetition of words or parroting, but well-designed interpretations of student ideas that feature, at times, cognitive content, and, at other times, affective content. Paraphrasing may perform, at least, five tasks: summarizing, clarifying, synthesizing, acknowledging, and empathizing (Garmston). Summarizing is a simple restatement of student ideas in other words. This may be useful in providing data for students to reconsider the structure and content of their ideas. Clarifying is restatement with the motive of reassuring the speaker and listener that the listener "has it." Synthesizing is really interpretation of student talk; it moves beyond the previous responses by adding to the student response by making lateral connections, moving it up or down a level of abstraction, re-naming concepts and so on. Acknowledging lets the student know the teacher is listening without positive or negative judgement. Empathizing reflects the emotional content of the message. This may be very helpful to students attempting critical thinking, for as we noted above in Christenbury and Kelly's work, the emotional state of the thinker is intimately related to how the student will construe "the matter."

The multi-modal nature of the person requires teachers to account for the results of thinking in a multi-modal fashion. Lazarus and Fay advocate that therapists attend to seven interactive modalities: behavior, affect, sensation, imagery, cognition, interpersonal relations, and biology. These modalities are transferrable to the classroom. Most students have a propensity to process information in habitual modalities. Close listening to verbal and nonverbal dimensions of student talk allow the teacher to discover the student's preferred modalities. By paraphrasing within the student's modalities the teacher can "pace" the student, to understand her constructs. From the "pace," the teacher can then "lead," the student (when appropriate) to new insights by sometimes working within student modalities or sometimes shifting to a new modality providing impetus for the student to develop a new construal of reality.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Stephen Lankton noted at the end of his essay, "Just Do Good Therapy," that an essay advocating that therapists find their own way as therapist may be understood, ironically, as the final prescription for how to do the task. This essay runs the same risk. In suggesting how therapy may provide a model for teaching critical thinking, we run the risk of limiting thinking about how that task may proceed. Having foregrounded that problem we want to conclude by suggesting some basic ideas adapted from Lankton that provide, for us, some general principles for facilitating thinking

in students. We urge readers to test these principles for themselves, add to them, or modify them as needed.

First, we believe that it is important that our teaching be grounded in clearly defined problems. Before teaching solutions to students, we must assist students in discovering significant problems within our content areas that need to be solved. Such an orientation provides a natural motivation to learn; such an approach also drives teacher and student to the notion of "criteria" (basic to critical thinking) as they establish what is a significant problem, and what makes for good solutions to the problem.

Second, it is essential that we get students active in their learning. As Rogers noted, no one can do the learning for students, so students must be charged with and supported in the learning process. Such an approach requires a lessening of control by the teacher of all dimensions of the learning process including evaluation (1951 415). Given that evaluation is a demanding thinking process that, when done reasonably, is grounded in appropriately selected criteria, it only makes sense that students do significant portions of evaluation of their own work.

Third, challenging the obvious requires students (and teachers) to be precise in defining problems; challenging the obvious also facilitates creative thinking because untested assumptions and habitual thinking patterns are made problematic.

Fourth, we have found the nonverbal cues of students provide us with valuable data about how students are responding to the classroom situation. Nonverbal messages signal internal response states of which students may not be aware or they may be trying to mask. Emotional responses of students may positively or negatively affect their thinking. If we are concerned about the whole (holonomous) person we must attend to affective dimensions of their lives as well as cognitive dimensions.

Finally, it is important that specific learning goals are articulated by teacher and student. As Lankton notes, "Making specific goals and going one step at a time is the only way in which complex behavior can be learned" (74). We are also convinced that one must have clear goals in order to know when one has finished the learning task.

CONCLUSION

Therapy provides a useful model for teaching critical thinking by placing thinking processes in the context of the whole person. Critical thinking is grounded in the language skills of the student as the student attempts to construct a structure of reality that is well adapted to the student's relational contexts. The didactic model of teaching, as described by Paul, does little to facilitate students learning how to creatively adapt to the changing world in which they exist; in fact, we suggest that a didactic approach not only inhibits holonomy in students, but actually contributes to inappropriate, ineffective, and unhealthy coping responses by creating schizophrenogenic environments. With a commitment to a therapeutic approach to teaching, we can make sure that the

students who succeed in our classes are not compulsive, but thoughtful, and confident in their ability to think critically about significant problems and articulately communicate their conclusions to others.

APPENDIX 1

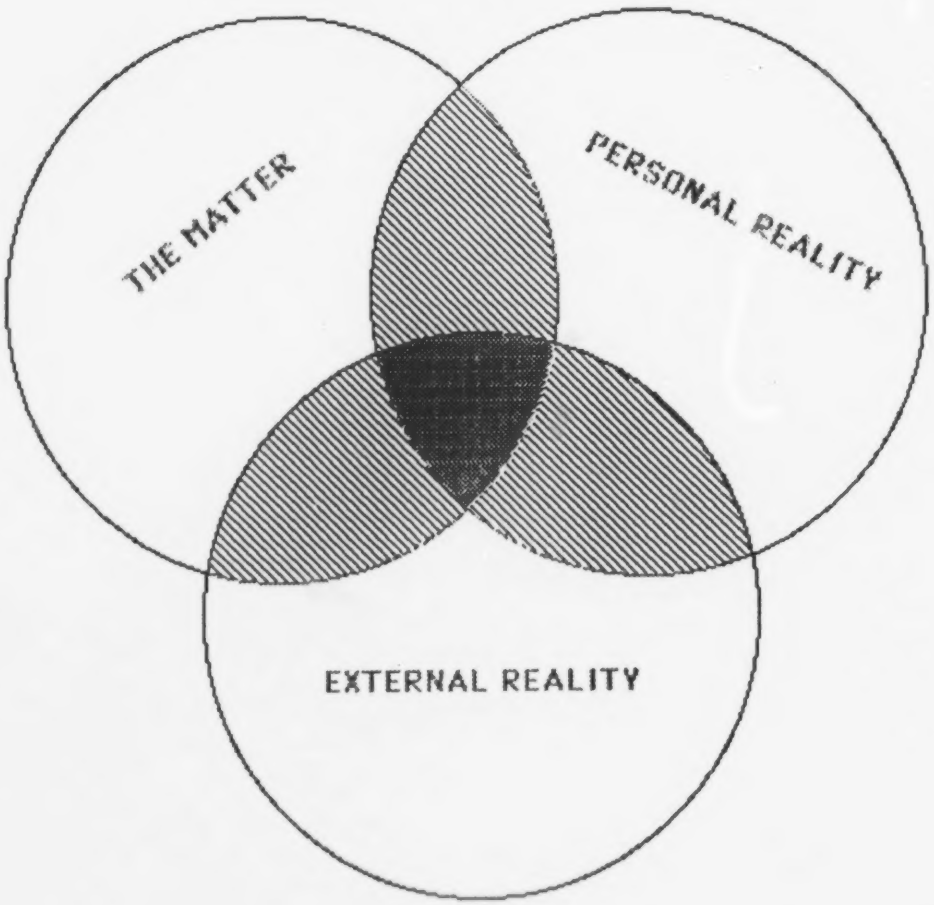
NEEDLES AND PINS

"Then, you must know
How lucky you are," they go.
On and on, the drone
Of sick, slick praise
At my ear.
Like cheap, rancid spit-fire
Filling my head with
Muck and mire.
"You do such splendid work.
You will succeed."
My ivory teeth grind,
Narrow gates to restrain
The thoughts that spring
to my mind.
It goes without saying,
But to extend the realization
Beyond
My own sphere of subconscious:
Inconceivable
I am dumb-struck.
Lost, awed, confused,
Terror imbued.
It has become a mistake
Of such grand proportion.
Please stop your lauding
Still silence the applauding.
Listen!
So many marvelous mistakes
Have met my befall.
Understand: I don't know
Anything at all.
Accidents so large
Exist, occur and
Tear at my neurons; synapse
Spills muddy your preconceived
notions.
Expectation weighs heavy
And I anticipate a bevy
Of failures to arrive
Any minute.
You see, you have mistaken
Clever for smart.
I possess the knowledge
Of what you desire me to say,
And what you want me to do.
I fake it.
"Liar!"
Yes, I can be that, too.

Amber Wythycombe, 1993
Winner, Distinguished Scholar Award; National Merit Scholar

APPENDIX 2

From: Questioning: A Path to Critical Thinking ED 226 372



THE QUESTIONING CIRCLES

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